

EXHIBIT B

Dr. Martha Beck 602-504-0808
Dr. Karen Gerdes 602-965-0505

Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse: The Case of Mormon Women

**Karen E. Gerdes, Martha N. Beck,
Sylvia Cowan-Hancock,
and Tracey Wilkinson-Sparks**

Adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse who are members of patriarchal religions face a particular challenge because church teachings and interactions with church members may present barriers to the full recognition and healing of their abuse. This article reports on a study of the experiences of 71 Mormon women survivors of abuse in their dealings with church leaders and the women's responses to these interactions.

Although the social work profession can trace its roots to the religiously inspired Charity Organization Societies of the turn of the century, contemporary social workers rarely apply knowledge of religious principles and organizations to their practice. Their failure to do so may be a disservice to the many religious persons who seek help from them. Many of these clients belong to religious groups that espouse a patriarchal

Authors' Note: The research on which this article was based was supported by a grant from the Eccles Foundation that was administered by the Women's Research Institute, Brigham Young University.

AFFILIA, Vol. 11 No. 1, Spring 1996 39-60
© 1996 Sage Publications, Inc.

belief system and follow organizational practices that deny full dignity to women and full consideration of their needs.

Nowhere is this pattern more obvious than with the adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse who are Mormons. Although Mormons are only a small fraction of persons who follow an organized religion, the treatment of such survivors by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (hereafter called the Mormon Church) illustrates the dilemma faced by religious women who attempt to come to terms with their history of childhood sexual abuse within the context of their religious beliefs and organizational membership. This article reports on a study of the experiences of 71 Mormon women in this regard. It describes the church's reactions to revelations of abuse, the reception the women received in their churches, and the healing paths the women chose.

BACKGROUND

The topic of childhood sexual abuse has received a great deal of attention from both the popular media and academic researchers since the 1980s. Perhaps the predominant explanation for this interest is the growing awareness of the severity of the psychological damage inflicted by sexual abuse (Briere, 1984; Browne & Finkelhor, 1986; Gold, 1986; Greenwald, Leitenberg, Cado, & Tarran, 1990). Some journalists (see, for example, Morris, 1992) have argued that the increased publicity surrounding such abuse constitutes a faddish mass hysteria, but most researchers believe that there has been an absolute increase in the incidence and severity of childhood sexual abuse, as well as an upsurge in victims' willingness to report their experiences (Carter, 1993). Studies have indicated that from 30% to 35% of all girls are sexually abused before age 18 (Finkelhor, 1984; Russell, 1986), a figure that some researchers (such as Dinsmore, 1991) consider to be conservative.

Unfortunately, religious families are not immune to the devastating effects of childhood sexual abuse. Several studies have

found that women from highly religious homes are just as likely to be abused as are nonreligious women (Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis, & Smith, 1989; MacMurray, 1985). Women from religious homes often feel an overwhelming sense of guilt and mistrust of social groups or organizations like the church that are similar to family structures. Indeed, the church (in a generic sense) has often done more harm than good in the healing process of victims of sexual abuse (Reese, 1989). For example, because children in religious homes often grow up hearing about the "evils" of sex outside marriage, if something sexual happens to an unmarried girl, she may feel guilty of complicity in her abuse.

Recently, the Roman Catholic Church has been plagued by persistent allegations of sexual abuse by priests and cover-ups of these charges by church administrators ("Catholicism and Sexual Abuse," 1993). Catholic and other religious leaders have acknowledged the problem of sexual abuse and the need for clergy to deal more effectively with it. The subject has also been addressed by ecclesiastical leaders of the Mormon Church, demonstrating the church's awareness of sexual abuse and desire to ameliorate its effects (Fyans, 1984; Hinckley, 1985; Monson, 1991; Pace, 1990; Peterson, 1989). However, sexual abuse continues to occur in Mormon families, and there are indications that the words of church leaders may not be trickling down to local lay leaders. Raynes, Stuart, and Pett's (1995) study of the sexual experiences of married Mormon women (from "very religious" homes) indicated that 26% of the 89 women in the study had been sexually abused as children.

In the study presented here, we asked Mormon women to talk about their experiences in confronting their childhood sexual abuse within the context of their religion. This is not an esoteric issue for Mormons, because Mormonism is what sociologists term a "life-world" (one that affects virtually every aspect of the members' daily lives and social interactions, as opposed to religious behavior that is limited to weekly church attendance or metaphysical exploration). In addressing the question of how Mormon women perceive the connection be-

tween the effects of abuse and their religious culture, we hope to shed light on how social workers can effectively assist victims of sexual abuse who are members of a patriarchal religion. Childhood sexual abuse is complex enough in a nonreligious environment. When it occurs in a social group dominated by strong religious beliefs, its complexities are magnified. Social workers who try to assist adult survivors of sexual abuse may find themselves dealing with religious social structures and moral systems whose effects on abuse and healing are powerful and not well understood.

In this study, we targeted a population of Mormon women who had been sexually abused in a geographic area (Utah's Wasatch Front) where members of this church constitute a clear majority (67%) of the total population. Our reason for choosing this population was that Mormonism shares elements of doctrine and practice with other mainstream religions and therefore provides a research foundation that may be effectively tested in other religious populations. These elements include the patriarchal nature of Mormon doctrines and social structures, the strong taboo against sex outside marriage, and the idea that punishments and rewards are attached to "wicked" or "righteous" behavior. Although the scope of the study was too small to include more than one religious group, the depth of the qualitative data collected and the patterns that emerged from the data should provide a fruitful comparative basis for examining sexual abuse in other religions.

OVERVIEW OF MORMONISM

Patriarchy and Mormonism

During the past few decades, feminists have used the term *patriarchy* to denounce the male domination of society. In this context, the word has accrued profoundly negative connotations. Within the culture of Mormonism, however, the term still has a positive meaning. The Mormon Church's scriptures and

leaders proclaim that the church is a "patriarchal order" and that such an order is the most effective and morally correct form of religious structure. Thus the Mormon Church presents an interesting forum for examining patriarchy not only because of this positive evaluation of the patriarchal Mormon order but also because power and authority are distributed much more widely in Mormonism (as evidenced by its lay ministry) than in most other patriarchal religions.

Lay Ministry

In most mainstream religions, authority is vested in a small percentage of people (usually men) who have chosen a ministerial vocation. In the Mormon Church, every "worthy male" aged 12 or older is ordained to the priesthood. In the Mormon-dominated communities of Utah, where the study was conducted, a Mormon boy or man who fails to be ordained is seen as an aberration and is often suspected of "unworthiness." Conversely, a man who holds the priesthood and is later found to be "unworthy" according to the standards of the church may have his priesthood authority revoked.

The hierarchy of the Mormon priesthood contains several ranks, many of which correspond to the ages of priesthood holders; thus, at age 12, boys are ordained "deacons," at 16, they become "priests," at 19, they become "elders," and so on. Every advancement up the ranks of priesthood is predicated on the candidate's worthiness, which is ascertained by personal interviews with a higher church authority. The definition of worthiness for each succeeding rank or position requires more and more stringent adherence to Mormonism's code of conduct.

Male Authority as a "Benevolent Protectorate"

The Mormon priesthood is depicted in the church's doctrine as an obligation to serve, as well as a mark of righteousness. The exclusive male privilege to hold the priesthood is defined by Mormon scripture as depending on a selfless approach to exer-

cising authority. Otherwise, the "power of the priesthood" is no longer considered viable. Thus the Mormon patriarchy is based on a model of male authority as a benevolent protectorate, in which the church leaders (broadly defined to include all priesthood holders) must act in the best interests of those below them in the chain of authority to retain their spiritual powers.

Every published discourse on abuse from the Mormon leadership clearly states that the perpetration of sexual abuse is antithetical to Mormon ideology. Speeches by the church's General Authorities (a group of 100 men who have been chosen as paid lifetime administrators, similar to the College of Cardinals) have explicitly denounced the sexual abuse of women and children, making it clear that such abuse is a violation not only of the victim but also of the ideal of the patriarchy as a benevolent protectorate (Monson, 1991; Pace, 1990). On the basis of these public statements, it would seem that the wide dissemination of the priesthood, the strict standards required for ordination, and the high expectations of benevolent leadership from Mormon men would greatly reduce the incidence and impact of sexual abuse by Mormons. The system of a lay ministry, personal interviewing, and strong social sanctions against those who do not qualify for ordination should act as powerful deterrents to sexual abuse by men and effective punishment for those who do offend. Moreover, one would expect a network of protective authority figures to whom any victim could turn for assistance in healing. This seems to be the supposition of the church's leadership because the church has responded to the recent rise in reported cases of abuse by heavily promoting and reinforcing the benevolent protectorate model of church structure.

Unfortunately, as has been noted, research on the incidence of abuse in Mormon populations does not support the hypothesis that Mormonism's tightly monitored, strict evaluations of men's behavior have served to eliminate abuse (Raynes et al., 1995). The study presented here was designed to focus on the qualitative aspects of abuse, to determine what impact religious-

ity itself may have on the characteristics of abuse and on the healing of survivors.

The study was concerned with two major questions: How does sexual abuse occur within the context of a life-world religion that includes so many mechanisms designed to discourage and punish it? And how does the structure of the Mormon Church, with its emphasis on men benevolently protecting women and children, affect the healing process of those who have been abused? We attempted to answer these questions by nondirective interviews with survivors in which we asked not only about the experience of abuse but also about its aftereffects and the women's attempts to heal, with specific attention to the religious context. Most active Mormons consider the Mormon Church to be an integral part of their everyday lives. How did their religious experience interact with the experience of abuse and healing?

METHOD

Subjects

Using a combination of therapists' referrals (purposive sampling) and a nonprobability snowball sampling method (in which initial participants recommend others), we identified 71 Mormon women who had been sexually abused as children. We sent 260 letters to therapists in Utah, informing them of the study and asking their clients to participate. Therapists' names were extracted from two sources: telephone directories and the list of managed-care providers for Deseret Mutual Benefit Administrators (the largest insurance provider for enterprises owned and operated by the Mormon Church). In addition, flyers announcing the study were placed in social service agencies, counseling centers, and other organizations. The mean age of the women in the sample was 32.5 years, with a range of 18-62. Thirty-four were married, 20 were single, 16 were divorced, and 1 was separated. Sixty women had taken some

college courses or had college degrees; 59 were active in the Mormon Church, 10 were not attending church, and 2 were no longer Mormons. The majority of the women grew up in Utah, California, Idaho, or other southwestern states. The average age at which their abuse began was 5.3 years old, with a range of 2-17 years.

The Researchers

The basically nondirective, open-ended style of interviewing adopted for this study was grounded in theoretical approaches of social scientists who have tried to avoid imposing observer bias on the experience of subjects (Levesque-Lopman, 1988; Smith, 1986). Ethnographic social scientists, particularly feminists, have argued that "positivist" methods, such as written survey questions, distort the experience of subjects to fit the bias of the researchers—especially when the subjects are female (Reinharz, 1992). Because all the subjects were women (and their experience of sexual abuse was intimately connected with their gender), we decided to use ethnographic, nondirective interviewing, adding only "scripted" questions after we had established clear categories of information that arose from the initial interviews.

Even in nondirective ethnography, all interviewers and analysts inevitably influence data collection simply because of the effects of their social interaction with the subjects. Therefore, an essential part of ethnographic analysis is a clear statement of the researchers' social position relative to the subjects' (Finch, 1984). The interview data for this study were collected and analyzed by the four of us, with collaboration from several colleagues who provided informed opinions and advice without seeing the subjects or the confidential data. At the time of the research, two of us were members of the Mormon Church and two were not. We adopted the ideals of "value neutrality" and objective weighing of evidence aimed for by most social scientists.

We did not volunteer any information about ourselves to the women during the interviews. Our responses to the women's stories (which were often emotionally intense) were limited to nods and noncommittal statements, such as "I see" or "I understand." The objective was to be supportive of each woman's effort to tell her story in the way she experienced it. Although the women's attitudes toward their religion varied, from clearly antagonistic to devoted, virtually all the women seemed to respond to the research approach by assuming that we shared their convictions about religion. In all cases, every effort was made to honor the women's viewpoint, language, and construction of their own experiences.

Procedures

All 71 women were asked to give written consent for their participation and permission to audiotape their interviews. Each interview lasted from 1 to 1½ hours, with a few taking up to 2 hours. Once the recordings were transcribed, the tapes were erased. No identifying information was transcribed.

Grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was the qualitative method used to guide the study. Grounded theorists advocate an inductive approach to research in which the researcher "builds conceptual categories [from the ground up] that 'fit' the data . . . and are meaningful and able to explain the behavior in question" (Kohler Riessman, 1994, p. 1). Because the collection and analysis of data and theory building are reciprocal in qualitative research, the data collection and analysis processes were interwoven (Spradley, 1979; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Table 1 depicts the interview process used to collect data.

The stimulus question was asked of the first 20 women who were interviewed. The transcripts of the first 20 interviews were then scanned for key phrases or descriptions of events that were decidedly repetitive. The themes and patterns that emerged from the analysis of the initial transcripts were (a) the women's interactions with church leaders, (b) the admonition to forgive, (c) the women's relationship with God, and (d) the women's

TABLE 1: Evolution of the Interview Questions

<i>Stimulus Statement</i>	<i>Open-ended, Semistructured Questionnaire</i>	<i>Supporting, Modifying, and Disconfirming Patterns</i>
<p>"We both know that I am here to talk about sexual abuse. If you are comfortable talking about that now, I would like to hear whatever you would like to share about your own experience. Please tell your story in whatever amount of detail feels comfortable to you."</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have you ever talked about your abuse with a church leader? If so, what was the experience like for you? 2. How do you feel about the "Christian" admonition to forgive your perpetrator? 3. How has the sexual abuse influenced your relationship with God? 4. Has the sexual abuse affected your relationship to the church organization? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Women have stated that what helps them heal the most is having a "voice," being heard, telling their story, and learning to rely on their own inner voice to make decisions. However, they have also noted that the church culture does not encourage this type of independent thinking and feeling. How do you feel about this issue? 2. Women have described a realization (that was related, at least in part, to their abuse) that the Church Organization and the Gospel of Jesus Christ are two separate things. Is there a difference between the Church and the Gospel to you? If so, what is it? 3. Women have described leading two lives: a "public" life at church, where you try to live up to the expectations of a "good" LDS (Mormon) woman, and a "private" life or hell, in which you deal with your abuse issues. Have you felt this "split" in your life? If so, how has it affected you?

relationship to the church organization. Although the actual abuse had occurred many years before, the patterns that were highlighted involved adult interactions within a Mormon context, all of which transpired after 1992. Subsequent interviews used a semistructured questionnaire to focus on the identified patterns, but allowed each interview to be guided by the participant's story. Finally, the last 40 women who were interviewed were asked to support, modify, or disconfirm the patterns that had been identified.

ANALYSIS

Interactions With Church Leaders

Twelve women had positive interactions and 49 women had negative interactions with church leaders, and 10 women said that they chose not to share their histories of sexual abuse with the leaders. (Because the women volunteered to participate, these numbers cannot be extrapolated beyond this sample.) Most of the women who shared their stories did so in an effort to be supported or to create a context for discussing related problems (such as drug abuse and promiscuity). One woman explained why so many victims of abuse seek counsel from their local congregational leaders (bishops): "We are taught if you have a problem, go to these men before you go to the police. If you go to the bishop and he says don't worry about it... since the image of the bishop is next to God, then you don't do anything."

On the positive side, the minority of women who had helpful interactions with church leaders stated that these interactions were one of the most powerful factors in their healing. They generally attributed the beneficial effects of the interactions to one or more of three key factors: The leader in question (a) had personal experience dealing with sexual abuse (for example, his mother, sister, or wife had been abused), (b) had received training in dealing with sexual abuse or was open to learning

about it from the victim's therapist, or (c) recognized that he did not have the expertise to deal with the situation and referred the woman to a therapist (in some cases, the church paid for the therapy). Women with positive experiences described their leaders as "nonjudgmental" and "affirming." These women's accounts suggest that the church can help survivors heal if the leaders' responses to victims is supportive and nonpunitive.

In contrast, women who had negative interactions referred to their leaders as "judgmental," "unbelieving," "protective of perpetrators who held the priesthood," "intrusive," "nosy," or "impatient." Four types of reactions were reported:

1. The leaders did not want to talk about the abuse or refused to believe that the alleged perpetrators "would ever do anything like that."
2. The leaders offered simple "solutions" (such as, "Stop thinking about it" or "Read your scriptures and pray more").
3. Several leaders implied that the victims just needed to "forgive and forget" and get on with their lives.
4. Some leaders implied that the abuse or related problems were the women's fault.

Women who chose not to share their histories of abuse with church leaders said that they had no confidence in their leaders' ability to help them. Ten women felt "threatened" because they believed they would be punished or silenced if they came forward with allegations of abuse. One woman went to her bishop in an effort to gain control over life choices that she felt were destructive. She explained that she had been sexually abused as a child and believed that the abuse was a primary factor in her compulsive behavior. As a result of her revelations to the bishop, she was excommunicated, which, she said, "emphasized that I was no good and not worthy of anything."

Five of the women who spoke to church leaders were disciplined by the church by being "disfellowshipped" (denied the privileges of praying and speaking publicly in church) or excommunicated for behaviors (such as sexual behavior) related to their abuse. Of the 80 Mormon perpetrators, only 3 were disciplined in any way. Thus sexual "impurity" by these adult

survivors of abuse, all of whom confessed their behavior voluntarily, was punished more harshly than was the sexual abuse of children by male priesthood holders.

Some of the perpetrators remained priesthood holders in good standing after they were *legally* convicted of molesting children. In the case of one perpetrator who admitted his guilt but was not legally tried, a bishop said that he had made sufficient recompense because he offered to pay the victim \$30 a month for 6 months; the total cost of this survivor's psychotherapy was about \$16,000. One woman reported her abuse to her bishop when the perpetrator, an uncle, moved into her ward (local congregation), because she was afraid that her uncle might molest other children. No action was taken against the uncle, and the woman was advised to keep quiet. It was not until months later, when the victim's *husband* insisted that the same authorities look into the matter, that a church disciplinary counsel convened and the perpetrator was *disfellowshipped*.

In a benevolent protectorate model, the church authority figure is portrayed as the arbiter of the ordinary members' problems and their link to God. Because survivors of sexual abuse are predisposed to mistrust authority figures, the disillusionment experienced by those whose leaders did not respond sympathetically contributed to their feelings of victimization, abandonment, and even persecution. These women felt that they were being "abused by the system," as they had previously been abused by sex offenders, and that they were caught in a hopeless spiral of rejection and subjugation.

Admonition to Forgive

Fifty women expressed frustration or guilt for being admonished by the highest church authorities or local leaders to "forgive" their perpetrators. Most of the women agreed that forgiveness is a *critical* part of the healing process. However, they were angered by the implication that forgiveness *leads to* healing. Rather, they often described forgiveness as "a gift from God" near the end of the healing process. One woman reported

that a church leader, from whom she sought guidance, told her that if she would forgive the perpetrator, she would forget that the abuse had ever occurred. Others were told that the fact that they remembered their abuse was evidence they had not "forgiven" sufficiently.

Thirty-seven women said that they had forgiven their perpetrators but depicted forgiveness as a "process that does not come automatically." The following quotations are representative of their comments about forgiveness:

Leaders throw forgiveness out there so quick. . . . It is just so out of context.

A lot of people skip the angry stage and go right to forgiveness, and then it eats away at them.

Not allowing yourself to be angry comes from the church. Part of the healing process is anger, and you have to go through that anger.

I felt like people were telling me to forgive before acknowledging what had happened to me. The only way you can let go is if you acknowledge it and feel it [the anger].

The following comments are representative of the 34 subjects who had not yet forgiven their perpetrators:

My feelings are that when I work through the issues I need to, then I can start dealing with forgiveness. But until then, it's something that I haven't even tried to do.

I am really angry if someone says I have to forgive. . . . Until I'm at a point where forgiveness is real, it's not going to happen. And until I've healed, until I've done what I need to do for my inner self, forgiveness won't be there.

In a social structure where power is unequally distributed, the good of the group depends on the benevolent use of power by those who hold it. In such a situation, the energies of the entire group, both the powerful and the powerless, tend to be focused on sustaining a belief in the benevolence of the leaders. The anxiety created for the whole Mormon community by breakdowns in the image of the benevolent protectorate seems

to contribute to exhortations to "hurry up and heal and forgive" before victims feel psychologically capable of forgiveness, denial, and minimization of the seriousness of the abuse and its consequences.

Spirituality and the Church Organization

The findings to this point did not support the belief that Mormon women (at least those in Utah or those with strong ties to the Utah Mormon culture) are universally protected and helped to heal by the male leadership structure of the church. Rather, the majority of the women reported feeling neither protected nor helped in their recovery process. This perception was a major factor that led to two other effects that the church leaders obviously did not intend to create. First, the majority of the women divided the church's leadership structures from its doctrinal or spiritual content, avoiding the former while revering the latter. Second, they created a corresponding division between their internal experience and their outward presentation of self in the church community, which often left them feeling isolated and cut off. The remainder of this section analyzes the first factor; the second factor is dealt with in the next section.

Sixty-five of the 71 women emphasized the importance of their "spiritual journey" in the healing process. One woman's comment was particularly striking:

I appreciate that, in a distorted way, the abuse opened the door for self-security and self-awareness. I don't know that I would have come to value and appreciate all that I have without that physically incestuous experience. I suspect that I would have played out the expected family script, married in my 20s, become a quietly supporting "Molly Mormon," and played out the family facade. *I don't wish the horrifying experience of sexual abuse-incest on anyone.* But as devastating as it was, it has allowed me to grow in sensitivity and awareness in my personal and spiritual life. . . . It is for this reason I chose not to see myself in a victim role.

Ten women did not distinguish between the spirituality and the organization of the Mormon Church in relation to their healing process. However, 40 identified ways in which the Mormon religious organization or leadership failed to support, hindered, or frustrated their spiritual development. For example, five women who associated their abuse with "fatherhood" reported feeling frustrated because even though Mormon doctrine claims that "God the Father" is accompanied by a female deity, "God the Mother," the church leaders have forbidden members to pray publicly to or worship the "Heavenly Mother." One woman described her relationship with the Heavenly Mother this way:

I was 10 years old, and we sang [a Mormon hymn which states] . . . "Truth is reason, truth eternal tells me I've a Mother there [in heaven]." And I started to sob. Throughout my life, the peace I have felt was indeed my Heavenly Mother who was telling me I was not alone. So for me, that has always been a strength . . . that is what has sustained me.

One woman said, "In church I am not allowed to question, but questioning is what empowers me." Another commented:

If you have any questions about the church or if you want to go out and answer those questions, you are excommunicated, or you're disfellowshipped, or you are not accepted. . . . Right now it is me learning on my own, not having to depend on church leaders.

In contrast, one woman noted that "there is starting to be more support in the general leadership for women to find . . . strength within themselves."

Forty women distrusted men and believed that patriarchy interfered with their spiritual growth. The following comment is indicative of their statements: "It's like being abused again because we are under a patriarchal system. And to fall under any more men is like being abused again, like ripping the rug out from under your feet. . . . Why do they have to learn at our expense? It shouldn't have to be this way."

Twenty-five women recalled going through a period of anger toward God, either because God did not stop their abuse or

because God was cast in the image of the "father-perpetrator." As one women put it, "I have a hard time with my relationship with God because a lot of the time when things were happening or when I could go home and just cry and cry at night, I would just beg and plead for some way for it to stop [but] it just never did."

Forty-six women did not go through such a period but relied on their image of a divine being to help them endure abuse and heal from its effects. As one woman said, "I feel like God is who I have to turn to when I am in the worst of my trials. That's all that gets me through sometimes. . . . I just feel He is a comforter and a help."

Presentation of Self in the Mormon Culture

Sixty-five women discussed their perceptions of the Mormon culture and its problematic or mixed effect on healing. Many mentioned the "code of silence" that surrounds the topic of sexual abuse, which one women summed up as, "Don't talk out loud about it or don't say too much." The majority of the subjects raised similar issues, as in the following comments:

Our religion is so cliquish. . . . It just seems that you have to be exactly like "this," and everybody has to be the same. I don't want to be just exactly like everybody else and I want to be accepted for who I am. I feel a lot of pressure to be perfect.

It [abuse] is like a taboo topic. . . . I feel like I can never share myself with people. I can't share my thoughts because sometimes they are not pleasant.

The women indicated that the cumulative effect of the code of silence and the Mormon cultural prohibition against the expression of anger and unpleasantness created a division between the "public identity" and the "private self" of survivors of abuse. The following are representative of their comments regarding the "public-private" split:

My friends named me "Serenity" because I presented [myself] as peaceful and in control, but they had no idea what was going

on inside of me. There were days when I was thinking about committing suicide.

During all the years of abuse, I was the Beehive president and the MIA Maid president. . . . My brother was the Deacon quorum's president. We were all very active and looked good. I think that's why the bishop wouldn't believe what happened. . . . It is hard to get away from hiding because no one believes it anyway. So then it feels like you are telling a lie even if you are telling the truth.

I would go to church, be MIA president, be perfect, and everyone thought everything was totally normal. At home, I'd be locked in the bathroom, crying, slitting my wrists, doing all these terrible things. I just totally lived two separate lives.

Clinical research indicates that sexual abuse creates a sense of isolation from the human community and that reestablishing the survivor's link to her culture and reference groups (such as a religious congregation) is essential to healing (Herman, 1992). The majority of women in the study were unable to establish such a healing link within the Mormon culture. Formal therapy, outside the church, offered many a "safe place" and a sense of social belonging. However, the leaders of the Mormon Church often encourage members with emotional problems to seek therapy only as a last resort and to turn first to the church community for help (Packer, 1989). In the case of these survivors of sexual abuse, whose experiences were bound by a cultural code of silence, this advice created a double bind and further complicated the healing process.

Several women said they had experienced the public-private split but that they no longer thought it was relevant to them. One woman noted, "I don't feel like I have to hide anymore. . . . I don't have to be perfect anymore. . . . I guess that is the process of healing." Three women did not identify with this split.

An Alternative Model

When a Mormon woman or child is sexually abused by a Mormon man (especially if the man has high status in the church or is a family member), the survivor's image of a social system that is protected by powerful religious leaders is often shattered. Studies, such as Elliott's (1994), have found that these survivors of abuse often experience increased levels of anxiety, dissociation, and sexual problems. For these Mormon women, trying to prevent or heal cases of abuse from within a benevolent protectorate model is *virtually impossible for someone* who has been deeply injured by a breakdown in the system.

However, despite the identified breakdowns in the benevolent protectorate model and the divided sense of self reported by the majority of the women, 59 of the 71 women were still active participants in the Mormon Church. Their continued participation in the church may be explained, in part, by their ability to separate the church leadership structure from their personal spiritual beliefs. These women also reported that a personal empowerment model of social interaction was a more effective route to psychological healing than were their attempts to get help from church authorities. In other words, some women were able to reinterpret their religion in the light of a personal empowerment worldview, rather than the benevolent protectorate view. Likewise, those who had good experiences with leaders reported they did not need miraculous or dramatic "healings." Rather, they benefited from the leaders' restraint in passing judgment, willingness to admit human limitations, help in finding professional treatment, and encouragement for them to trust their own instincts.

CONCLUSION

Millions of Americans are deeply committed to churches and other religious organizations, many of which adhere to spiritual

systems that are patriarchal and often discount the spiritual and psychological needs of women. Women who report that they were sexually abused as children often meet with resistance, disapproval, and censure from their religious leaders, which inhibits their recovery and healing. This situation was evident in the responses of the Mormon women in this study.

Social workers can educate and work with church leaders to shift the paradigm away from the idea that the benevolent protectorate must be the agent of social control and toward the idea that individual women and children who are survivors of abuse may be the best source of guidance for their own healing. If this paradigm shift occurred on a broad scale, the support of the church community for the survivor's perceptions and experiences would replace demands to conform to group expectations. The divided presentation of self, which many of the women found painful and destructive, might then be unnecessary.

The findings of this study suggest that social workers who seek to help victims of sexual abuse must be sensitive to clients' religious belief systems, but also empower their clients to rely on their personal judgments to effect healing. Relying on personal judgments is especially important when survivors, in an attempt to uncover the past, confront church leaders who deny or minimize the abuse or who censure them and not the perpetrators. The most effective way for social workers to assist women who are members of patriarchal religions to stop sexual abuse and its aftereffects is to help clients who have been abused develop a sense of personal capability and responsibility. Armed with these strengths, survivors can cope effectively with the insensitivity of the local church leaders and find their own paths to healing.

More research is needed to clarify the relationship between religion and sexual abuse. The results of this study clearly show that if a social worker was interacting with a Mormon population, it would be virtually impossible to intervene successfully in problems like sexual abuse and healing without a clear understanding of how these problems relate to the clients'

religious context. Religion creates both extraordinary difficulties and some potential benefits for survivors of abuse. By understanding this fact, a social worker may ameliorate the negative effects and maximize the positive. Frequently, because of its humanistic grounding, social work intervention may be seen as threatening to a client's religious system or may overlook the pressures, tensions, and rewards associated with religious belief and participation. Thus social workers who are informed about the history, values, and customs of religious groups will be most helpful to church leaders and individual members who want to heal the scars of childhood sexual abuse.

REFERENCES

- Briere, J. (1984, March). *The effects of childhood sexual abuse on later psychological functioning: Defining a post-sexual abuse syndrome*. Paper presented at the Third National Conference on Sexual Victimization of Children, Children's Hospital National Medical Center, Washington, DC.
- Browne, A., & Finkelhor, D. (1986). Impact of child sexual abuse: A review of the research. *Psychological Bulletin*, 99(1), 66-77.
- Carter, B. (1993). Child sexual abuse: Impact on mothers. *Affilia*, 8, 72-90.
- Catholicism and sexual abuse. (1993, January 27). *Christian Century*, pp. 77-78.
- Dinsmore, C. (1991). *From surviving to thriving*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Elliott, D. M. (1994). The impact of Christian faith on the prevalence and sequelae of sexual abuse. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 9, 95-108.
- Finch, J. (1984). It's great to have someone to talk to: The ethics and politics of interviewing women. In C. Bell & H. Roberts (Eds.), *Social researching: Politics, problems and practice* (pp. 70-87). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Finkelhor, D. (1984). *Sexually victimized children*. New York: Free Press.
- Finkelhor, D., Hotaling, G. T., Lewis, I. A., & Smith, C. (1989). Sexual abuse and its relationship to later sexual satisfaction, marital status, religion, and attitudes. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 4, 379-399.
- Fyans, J. T. (1984). Gospel power in troubled homes. *Association of Mormon Counselors and Psychotherapists Journal*, 16, 147-158.
- Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Gold, E. R. (1986). Long-term effects of sexual victimization in childhood: An attributional approach. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 54, 471-475.
- Greenwald, E., Leitenberg, H., Cado, S., & Tarran, M. J. (1990). Childhood sexual abuse: Long-term effects on psychological and sexual functioning

- in a nonclinical and nonstudent sample of adult women. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 14, 503-513.
- Herman, J. (1992). *Trauma and recovery*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Hinckley, G. B. (1985, May). To please our Heavenly Father. *Ensign*, pp. 48-51.
- Kohler Riessman, C. (1994). *Qualitative studies in social work research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Levesque-Lopman, L. (1988). *Claiming reality: Phenomenology and women's experience*. Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield.
- MacMurray, V. (1985). In a peaceable habitation. *Association of Mormon Counselors and Psychotherapists Journal*, 17, 11-12.
- Monson, T. S. (1991, November). Precious children—A gift from God. *Ensign*, pp. 67-70.
- Morris, M. (1992, April 24). Hokey therapy. *Provo Journal*, p. 3.
- Pace, G. L. (1990, November). A thousand times. *Ensign*, pp. 8-10.
- Packer, B. K. (1989). Solving emotional problems in the Lord's own way. *Relief Society Manual* (pp. 70-77). Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
- Peterson, H. B. (1989, July). Unrighteous dominion. *Ensign*, pp. 6-11.
- Raynes, M., Stuart, F. M., & Pett, M. A. (1995, April). Sexual experiences of married Mormon women. *Sunstone*, pp. 35-43.
- Reese, C. (1989, July-August). Recognizing and healing sexual abuse. *The Christian Ministry*, pp. 16-18.
- Reinharz, S. (1992). *Feminists methods in social research*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Russell, D. (1986). *The secret trauma: Incest in the lives of girls and women*. New York: Basic Books.
- Smith, D. (1986, May). Institutional ethnography: A feminist model. *Resources for Feminist Research*, pp. 6-13.
- Spradley, J. (1979). *The ethnographic interview*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Karen E. Gerdes is Assistant Professor and Director of the Bachelor of Social Work Program, School of Social Work, Arizona State University, Tempe. Martha N. Beck is Faculty Associate, American Graduate School of International Management, Phoenix. Sylvia Cowan-Hancock is Visiting Professor, School of Social Work, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. Tracey Wilkinson-Sparks is a recent alumna of the Graduate School of Social Work, Brigham Young University.